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Curriculum for Ontario Secondary Schools

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Understanding and Participating in Curriculum Change

Curriculum Guidelines for Ontario secondary schools have not been re-written in almost a decade. The reform of secondary schools provides an opportunity to undertake significant change to ensure Ontario has a high-quality curriculum suited to today's realities.

Today's students require a strong foundation of skills and knowledge when they graduate from high school. They also require the personal qualities to apply their knowledge and skills responsibly as individuals and as citizens in a democratic society. High quality curriculum can serve students well in achieving these results.

This paper provides

- information about the characteristics of the new curriculum and the emphasis on high standards
- the proposed schedule for development of the new curriculum
- an opportunity to suggest those areas of achievement that should be required of all secondary school graduates

Relevant and Rigorous Curriculum

To achieve excellence, the students of Ontario must be challenged by a demanding curriculum suited to their goals. Whether they intend to go to university or college, or to enter the workplace after secondary school, they must be focused on relevant learning. High quality curriculum can prepare students for success in their chosen careers and provide satisfaction as they realize their personal goals.

The new curriculum materials will increase the quality of learning and the consistency of requirements from Grade 1 to Grade 12. All students, including those going to university, will complete their secondary school programs in four years. Students who plan to enter the workplace or most college programs will take courses which teach fundamental skills and knowledge while emphasizing applications of learning to real-life situations. University bound students will take courses in their fourth year which are more challenging than the current Ontario Academic Courses (OACs). All of our students will be prepared for productive lives and will be able to take pride in their accomplishments.

Definition of Curriculum

Curriculum is the plan for student learning which is implemented in schools.

The term *curriculum* refers to both general and specific plans for student learning. The most general component of curriculum proposed for Ontario will state the comprehensive results required of graduates, such as being technologically literate. These broad statements will be completed in the first stage of curriculum development. They will ensure that the other more detailed curriculum components are consistent.

Two more specific components of curriculum are proposed: Curriculum Guidelines and Course Profiles. They will contain clear definitions of the skills, knowledge and attitudes students will develop in particular subjects. In these documents the subject content will be stated clearly enough to assure depth and consistency, while still giving teachers the opportunity to use resources and methods that suit the students they teach.

The most detailed component of curriculum consists of classroom units in which teachers record teaching and assessment methods for specific skills and knowledge. Although a few sample units may be prepared for the province, most units will continue to be prepared by teachers who will be encouraged to share their work. For example, the Curriculum Guidelines might list as one part of a science curriculum a number of features of freshwater environments that students must understand. A teacher in one part of the province might use a local marshland as an instructional site, while a teacher in another part of Ontario, perhaps a more urban location, would choose visual, print, and software resources about the Great Lakes. These choices would be reflected in the teachers' units.

The Role of Standards

The phrase "curriculum with high standards" is used frequently in a general way to mean a challenging curriculum that will allow Ontario students to develop excellent skills and knowledge, to realize their personal potential and to compete with students from other provinces and countries. The Ontario curriculum will have high standards in this sense.

In addition, "standards" has a more technical meaning. Standards are statements of required results whose meaning is made very clear by Performance Indicators. These Indicators are descriptions of what achievement actually looks like. The following is an everyday example of standards in action.

When buying a car, we say that the car must be fuel efficient. That is the standard. To define exactly what we mean by fuel efficiency, we have in mind a range of fuel consumption levels that are satisfactory, or even really good. These are the Performance Indicators. If the car is more economical than the range, we rate it excellent. If it is less economical, we rate it unacceptable and refuse to buy it. The Performance Indicators allow us to describe what our standard looks like in reality.

Similarly, a student may be required to write a five paragraph essay with accurate spelling and grammar. We all know, however, that there are additional qualities of thought, creativity and research that go into an essay, and that these have to be taken into consideration. Performance Indicators can be used by teachers to pinpoint the qualities of essays they are evaluating. They can categorize student work as excellent or unacceptable, or somewhere in between. The more demanding the indicators, the higher the standard.

By using clearly stated Standards and Performance Indicators, students, parents and the public will be able to understand what is meant by a high quality curriculum, and teachers across the province will feel confident in evaluating student work consistently. The new curriculum will include clearly expressed Standards and Performance Indicators.

In addition to using the new Standards and Performance Indicators, teachers will continue to use percentage grades to report student achievement.

Development of Proposed Secondary Curriculum

The new curriculum will have to be developed over the next three years beginning with the most general statements and proceeding to the requirements for particular subjects, grades and courses.

Many people can be involved in the development of the new curriculum. Parents, students, teachers, college and university educators, private sector representatives, and members of community groups would add value to the process.

Proposed Schedule

Comprehensive Results

Comprehensive results outline the major categories of learning. Each student must have skills and knowledge in each of these areas by the end of secondary school.

By keeping in mind the comprehensive results, curriculum designers make sure that within the total curriculum, they include a good balance of all the essential areas.

Suggestions received during the secondary school reform consultation process will be used to develop a set of comprehensive results that will be complete by **March 1997.** These will guide development of detailed subject curriculum.

Curriculum Guidelines

There will be one Curriculum Guideline per subject. The Guideline will state the required learning for that subject for the secondary school years. The Guideline will include material that is part of compulsory courses as well as material to be included in optional courses. It will be moderately detailed, but not as detailed as the Course Profiles for individual courses.

In addition to the learning outcomes for the subject, the Guidelines will contain additional information about support for exceptional students, provision of equal opportunity for all students, development of appropriate assessment methods, and the application of standards.

Draft versions of these Curriculum Guidelines will be ready by **October 1997.** They will be a logical continuation of curriculum already revised for earlier grades and will provide, for teachers, an early overview of the curriculum to graduation.

Course Profiles

There will be one Course Profile for every course that secondary schools will offer, whether the course is compulsory or optional.

Profiles will be specific to subject, grade and type of course. They will contain specific requirements for the course, including more detailed outcomes, assessment strategies and required standards, instructional materials, support for exceptional students and adults, and recommendations for learning resources.

All Course Profiles will contain suggestions for technological applications suited to the course.

The first sample Course Profile will be ready by **October 1997,** and development of a group of Course Profiles will proceed in conjunction with the validation of the Curriculum Guidelines during the 1997-98 school year.

An extensive complement of Course Profiles will be completed in **1998-99 and 1999-2000.**

Important features of the proposed new curriculum

1) Comprehensive and Consistent Program for Grades 1 - 12

Increased consistency and clarity, as well as added challenge, from Grade 1 to Grade 12 have already been introduced in newly written materials. During 1996, the Ministry of Education and Training will release additional detailed curriculum materials in draft form for Grades 1 - 9 in Language and Mathematics.

The additional detailed materials have been written in anticipation of the four-year high school program and establish new and higher standards for Grade 9. These new materials address concerns about making requirements more demanding across the grades, especially in Grades 7, 8 and 9, and not simply squeezing five years of high school into four.

The additional materials will be field-tested in 1996-97, and they will provide the foundation for development of the Curriculum Guidelines for secondary schools in the summer of 1997. Detailed curriculum materials for Grades 1 - 9 in other program areas will follow in 1997-98.

2) Development in a Logical Sequence

It is important that developers of materials for specific courses have an overall view of the subject. The appropriate approach is, therefore, to write the general outlines of subjects (Curriculum Guidelines) first, and then prepare the more detailed materials within those subjects (Course Profiles).

By September of 1998, when the first students begin the new secondary school program, the comprehensive results and draft Curriculum Guidelines will give teachers a clear idea of the major outcomes for graduation. The overview provided by the comprehensive results and Curriculum Guidelines will allow teachers to present materials in a much more coherent way and will ensure students a continuum in each subject.

3) Implementation of New Curriculum

As the reform of secondary schools proceeds, new curriculum will be developed quickly enough to ensure consistency and coherence within and among subjects. Particular attention will be given to making sure that learning in various subjects is clearly related. Curriculum materials will include ways for teachers to make connections among subjects in their day-to-day practice, and thus give students learning experiences that go beyond isolated skills into real-world applications.

It is also important to realize that when new curriculum is introduced, teachers need to understand the differences in content and standards that the new curriculum represents. They need to plan different approaches to classroom instruction and design lesson plans that take advantage of local resources. They need to involve the community and explain new courses to parents. Finding the best ways to combine swift development with effective implementation will be one of the challenges of secondary reform.

Suggestions for Student Achievement

Consistent requirements for achievement are necessary for a strong curriculum. It is important to have a set of comprehensive results that are part of many different subjects or courses.

For example, many people would say that using problem-solving skills goes beyond the specifics of a math class. A comprehensive result of education might be the ability to use problem-solving skills in a variety of circumstances.

Another example might be understanding how to use language precisely. This skill might be identified as a comprehensive result, broader than any one course or subject.

Before Curriculum Guidelines are written, it is important to define these comprehensive results. We anticipate that there might be a dozen or more. Curriculum developers will include the necessary details of the subject as well as emphasize the comprehensive results.

In response to this document, readers are invited to make their own suggestions about the results of secondary education for every student.

Suggestions will contribute to the writing of comprehensive results as noted on the schedule for curriculum development.

Possible Approaches to Curriculum Development

Ontario will consider a variety of ways to develop quality curriculum. A necessary feature of any approach will be widespread input at several stages, so that the opinions of many groups and individuals will be taken into account in preparing the final version.

Parents, students, teachers, college and university educators, private sector representatives, and members of community groups can expect to have a voice in curriculum development.

The following are some possible approaches to development:

- teams of developers from schools, universities, colleges, and the workplace working with ministry staff who can oversee the consistency and completeness of materials
- existing consortia, which represent different perspectives or expertise, that can develop materials based on ministry specifications for overall curriculum consistency and rigour
- groups organized in response to specific ministry requests for proposals
- adaptation of curriculum developed in other jurisdictions
- participation in Pan-Canadian projects
- partnerships with other organizations with expertise in specific areas

These, and other methods for producing and adapting quality curriculum, will be explored.

Conclusion

The province-wide discussion of secondary education initiated by release of *Ontario Secondary Schools (1998) Detailed Discussion Document* will lead to new policy for secondary education. Decisions about such issues as compulsory courses, work experience, the character of Grade 9, and the role of assessment will have a significant influence on the development of curriculum.

In the meantime, the best methods for developing some of the common features of Curriculum Guidelines are being examined. Suggestions about comprehensive results are being sought as part of the secondary consultation.

When the other policy decisions are made, the work on detailed curriculum development will intensify, so that Ontario curriculum will be recognized as superior, nationally and globally.

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We Would Appreciate Your Feedback

You are invited to make suggestions about the contents of this paper.

1. What are your suggestions for the comprehensive results that should be required by the end of secondary school?
2. Do you have any further comments about the curriculum process as outlined?

Additional space for your suggestions is provided on pages 14 and 15.

Respondent Information

This information will be used only to categorize responses to the questions on the previous pages.

Please indicate if you are responding as:

- ☐ an organization/ institution
- ☐ an informal group
- ☐ an individual

Response Categories

Indicate which of the following categories applies to you or your group/organization/institution.

- ☐ **Secondary School** ☐ Public ☐ Separate
  - ☐ student ☐ parent ☐ teacher-guidance counsellor
  - ☐ teacher-coop. education ☐ teacher-other ☐ administrator
  - ☐ student council ☐ school council ☐ home-school/ teacher-parent association
- ☐ **Elementary School** ☐ Public ☐ Separate
  - ☐ student ☐ parent ☐ teacher-guidance counsellor
  - ☐ teacher-other ☐ administrator ☐ student council
  - ☐ school council ☐ home-school/teacher-parent association
- ☐ **School Board** ☐ Public ☐ Separate
  - ☐ trustee ☐ senior administrator ☐ coordinator/consultant
- ☐ **Recent Secondary School Graduate (since 1990)**
  - ☐ employed ☐ unemployed
- ☐ **College of Applied Arts and Technology**
  - ☐ student ☐ parent ☐ faculty ☐ administrator
- ☐ **University**
  - ☐ student ☐ parent ☐ faculty ☐ administrator
- ☐ **Private Vocational School**
  - ☐ student ☐ parent ☐ faculty ☐ administrator
- ☐ **Other Education-related Organization**
  - ☐ executive director/board of directors
- ☐ **Private Sector**
  - ☐ employer ☐ executive ☐ human resources ☐ employee

☐ **Not-for-Profit Sector**

☐ board/executive director ☐ human resources ☐ employee

☐ **Professional/Trade Association**

☐ **Labour Organization**

☐ **General Public**

Please indicate if you want your comments to be considered with reference to one school system in particular:

☐ English ☐ French ☐ Other (please specify) _____

Please provide the following information:

Name of Organization/Institution:

_____

Contact name: Title:

_____ _____

Mailing address:

_____

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Thank you for your time and effort.

Please submit your response at your earliest convenience, but no later than November 30, 1996. You can send it by mail to:

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